

**PRIVATE SECTOR
VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL STATEHOLDER GROUP**

01/23/2006 – Tumwater, WA

Minutes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROVIDERS

Attendees

Michael Barron, IAM Crest
Cathy Cottingham, People Systems, Inc.
Sheryl Cousineau, Sheryl's Rehab Service
Patti Kacz, Intracorp
Fred Cutler, Cutler Counseling, LLC
Kari D'Aboy, Career Horizon
Jenipher Gaffney, Gaffney Counseling & Consultants
Terry McCall, Corvel
Jill Rosenthal, Rehabilitation and Evaluation Services
Corey Turner, Vocational Connections
Nancy Ziegler, Broadspire
Bradley Ehrlich, Career Opportunity Group

Absent

April Poier, Grant and Associates

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIES

Attendees

Rheo Aieta
Rich Wilson
Don Lane
Keith Klinger
Donna Spencer
Sigrid Alejandro

Audience Members

Todd Gendreau, Strategic Consulting

John James, Labor & Industries

Sara Spiering, Labor & Industries

Steve Pierce, Labor & Industries

Welcome & Review Minutes – Rheo Aieta

The minutes from the November 21, 2005 VTSG meeting were reviewed. It was asked why L&I had discontinued recording the VTSG minutes on tape. It was reported that the quality of previous tapes were poor and it was clarified that each presenter was responsible for submitting minutes of their own presentation. It was further asked if the public meeting requirements were being met without recording the meetings. Public meeting requirements will be reviewed before the next VTSG meeting.

Announcements – Rheo Aieta & Rich Wilson

Rheo made the following announcements:

- **Forensic rulemaking:** Approximately 200 survey questionnaires were distributed within various departments of L & I. 14 responses were received regarding potential new WAC 296A-125, 130, and 210 (3) Forensics Rulemaking. There were no requests to also include CDMS certification as acceptable criteria for meeting the qualifications for receiving forensic referrals. 9 responses reported no problems with existing WACs. Other comments included a request for more training, a complaint regarding late reports, a complaint regarding poor results, and an edit of the wording within the WACs. The Pension Unit provided the most comprehensive response to the survey by emphasizing the need for well documented outcome recommendation.
- **VDRO data update:** In the beginning of 2005, VRCs were informed VDRO would begin collecting data of poor VRC work. VRCs are now copied with dispute decisions. Percentages of VRC findings to total dispute reviews has decreased from 29.5% and 27.3% during the first two quarters of 2005 to 16.8 % the 3rd quarter and 23.4% for the 4th quarter. This is an 8.3% drop over the last 6 months from the first 6 months of 2005. Correlating VDRO data to individual VRCs began in January of 2006. This information will be used as an additional risk analysis tool for determining PSRS audits. Any decision regarding additional reporting of VDRO data is still pending.

- **Fall conference evaluations:** The 12/9/2005 conference was well attended by 195 private sector and L&I participants. 71.5 % of the conference evaluations generated an overall rating of very good to excellent. 71 % provided ratings of very good to excellent for the information provided. 76 % rated the syllabus materials very good to excellent.

The following is a summary of the written responses to the question, “How will you change your counseling or vocational testing style because of the material presented in this conference?”

- Will improve quality of labor market surveys and/or summaries — **23** responses
- Will improve quality of microfiche reviews — **7** responses
- Will conduct better pre-screening for testing, particularly review of educational history, and/or provide more attention/rational as to the **Why** of vocational testing — **18** responses (Some responses also reported less plans to use in-house testing and to seek more “experts”).
- Do not expect to change/the information was too basic — **12** responses from VRCs with work experience ranging from 12 to 30 years.

Most frequent complaints were as follows:

- Room was too hot and/or too crowded
- The testing information was not practical due to CACO restraints and did not address difficulty knowing what tests to use and/or where to find qualified evaluators.

Most frequent requests were as follows:

- Schedule Fall conference earlier in the year
- Create a statewide LMS database for all VRCs to access

Rich made the following announcements:

The department is actively recruiting to fill a number of positions in the Return-to-Work Services program. Rich asked committee members to help get the word out on these opportunities. The job bulletins and application instructions are located at the L&I web site, <http://www.lni.wa.gov> under “find a job at L&I”.

The following positions are open:

- Therapist Consultant
- Performance Measure Administrator

- Vocational Purchasing Manager
- Vocational Services Consultant

Improving Occupational Health Practices for Surgical Care – Karen Jost

Karen Jost presented an overview of a pilot project that Health Services Analysis is developing. The purposes of the presentation were:

- Share information about the project, which is being designed to improve quality and consistency of orthopedic and neurosurgical care for injured workers.
- Share and obtain feedback on the draft “Activity Prescription Form” that is part of the pilot.
- Enlist the support of vocational providers to reduce administrative burden for doctors by avoiding duplicate requests for information, sending only appropriate job analyses for review, and potentially develop a consistent format for job analyses.

Vocational Improvement Initiative Update – Rich Wilson

Rich gave a presentation on the Vocational Improvement Initiative. The initial plans for the initiative were shared at the September and November 2005 VTSG meetings. Since that time, work groups have been formed, and topics for exploration have been identified. The improvement work groups are organized as follows:

- Claim Manager Education and Accountability
- Provider Education, Accountability and Performance Measure
- ERTW Improvements
- Legislation and prototypes

A Business & Labor subgroup has been formed. The group members are Jeff Johnson and Frank Prochaska for Labor, and Lori Carlson and Terry Peterson for Business.

Ideas from the CM Education and Accountability work group:

- Re-define medically unstable concept to reduce number of referrals closed this way as a “catch all”.
- Reduce delays to first AWA referral.
- Identify consistent and timely process for CMs to obtain physical capacities information prior to making vocational referral.

- Identify new ways to obtain valid work and educational history earlier in the claim.
- Validate methods used to measure CMs quality of vocational decisions.
- Ask QA staff to review medically unstable outcomes to identify any trends to target.
- Help CMs understand impact of eligibility determination.

Ideas from the Provider Education, Accountability and Performance Measure work group:

- Increase provider accountability for understanding and following voc. rules and policies.
- Limit number of branches private VRCs can list availability in.
- Place a cap on the number of open referrals a provider can have. Display open referral numbers by VRC on LINIIS.
- Address aspects of performance measure that emphasize time over quality.
- Address issues pertaining to use of interns/supervision of interns:
- Require VRCs to physically sign off all intern reports.
- Require providers to notify department of intern and supervisor assignment on referrals

ERTW improvement ideas:

- Clarify and standardize communication and documentation of field activities on LINIIS.
- Standardize and document CM responsibility when ERTW claim returned to Tumwater.
- Look into costs and benefits of field vocational referrals to private sector. Identify process improvements.
- Identify ways to increase RTW success across the program.

Prototype possibilities:

- Develop Worker certified work and educational history.
- Increase statutory limits of time and/or money for retraining:
- Additional funds to address increased tuition costs.
- Additional time to gain exposure to more retraining opportunities.

- May be proposed as either a prototype or as a statutory change affecting all eligible workers
- Occupational medicine mentor oversight or review of attending doctor information during AWA, plan development and/or plan implementation.
- Form partnerships with other resources: Community Colleges/Voc techs; WorkSource; Apprenticeship, etc.
- Identify “soft landing” alternatives for workers who are exiting the system.

Outreach efforts:

- Vocational Technical Stakeholder Group
- IARP Management Group
- Insurance Services Executive Team
- L&I Fall vocational conference
- Each claim unit (ongoing)
- Apprenticeship Program
- Clover Park Technical College
- Pacific Mountain Work Source
- National Institute of Disability Management and Research

Next steps:

- Work with Public Affairs to develop communication plan.
- Continue to lead workgroups to define improvement ideas and implementation methods.
- Stakeholder improvement ideas.
- Meet with Business/Labor representatives to share our concepts and discuss their ideas for prototypes or legislation.
- Additional outreach efforts to identify new ideas and resources and to increase awareness of issues.
- Meet with Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to review potential use of Work Readiness Credential for our workers.
- Create initiative updates for vocational web site, with capacity for feedback via e-mail

The department plans to place initiative updates on the vocational web site, and also include a facility for parties to provide their ideas and input.

Ideas from the committee members were captured during Rich's presentation. These were the ideas that the members wanted to have additional discussion on:

- Re-define medically unstable
- CM's process for identifying physical capacity info
- Obtaining work & educational histories
- Limit branches
- Limit caseload size
- Best practices for working with interns
- ERTW referrals to private sector
- Limits on retraining budgets
- Cc doctor's on progress reports
- Get AAG opinion on partnerships
- Obtain frontline ideas by using private providers
- Learn what CM's are taught
- Use IW's on initiative work groups
- Make skill enhancements legal
- Beef up required documentation in EI
- Eastern Washington needs full room & board for per diem
- Discussion of release of information
- OOS challenges
- Consider community involvement
- Add new codes for different kinds of outcomes for medically unstable

Review of criteria for VTSG led agenda – Rich Wilson & Rheo Aieta

Rheo clarified that L&I welcomed and encouraged any VTSG requests for agenda topics to be led by L&I staff that provided the VTSG members to provide feedback (i.e. the previous request for a preview of the Fall Conference microfiche presentation and request for updates to the Vocational Improvement Initiative). He also clarified that these requests are separate from and are not considered to meet the criteria for VTSG led items.

Rich provided the following examples of what would be considered VTSG led items:

- A “white paper” or similar format proposal that documents the potential need for a statutory change to increase time and/or money available for worker rehabilitation plans
- A presentation on how private vocational providers deal with the issues of disclosure and releasing/obtaining confidential information regarding workers
- A presentation or proposal on how private providers would address the L&I goal of reducing the paperwork burden on medical providers
- A presentation or proposal on the pros and cons of adopting a standardized job analysis format in the Washington workers’ comp system

Audience Comments

Todd Gendreau commented that he feels “we are being heard but not being heard”. He made the following suggestions:

- Have the Vocational Improvement initiative Update on each agenda.
- Invite some or all Core Team members of the Vocational Improvement Initiative to the VTSG meeting.

John James commented he was inspired by the energy that was displayed during the meeting. He thanked all in attendance for their strong commitment.

THE NEXT VTSG MEETING WILL BE March 27, 2006 in Tukwila.